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[A] **Chapter 8. Taste and textiles: selling fashion in eighteenth-century provincial England**

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[B] **Introduction**

Much has been written in recent years about the changing material culture of textiles in late seventeenth and eighteenth-century Britain, especially the rise of cotton textiles from India.¹ Imports varied greatly year on year, but they rose some 30 per cent in volume and over 150 per cent in value between the 1670s and 1740s.² Some have emphasized the part which this played in a broader transformation of domestic material culture: the early use of chintz and calico as furnishing fabrics coinciding with a growing emphasis on domestic comfort and decoration.³ Their impact was profound, Defoe famously complaining that they ‘crept into our houses, our closets, and bedchambers; curtains, cushions, chairs, and at last beds themselves, were nothing but calicoes and Indian stuffs’. But he also noted the spread of cottons from ‘their floors to their backs; from the footcloth to the petticoat’.⁴ Both rich and poor followed the craze for printed cottons, which were increasingly used in petticoats, gowns, handkerchiefs, and so on.⁵ Alongside imported silks, they were markers of status and fashionability. Such was their popularity that the government moved to ban the import (1700) and subsequently the wearing of printed calicos (1720). Whilst subverted by widespread smuggling of re-exported fabrics, these prohibitions are often seen as stimulating the British cotton industry by encouraging the development of mixed fabrics which acted as substitute status commodities.⁶

All of this is familiar enough. Much less well understood are the processes by which consumers acquired these goods – a lacuna which is all the more remarkable given the apparent importance of ‘new’ textiles in the transformation of consumption practices. The resale of stolen goods and second-hand clothing has attracted much attention; and the gradual

shift from self-provision to market supply forms a central part of Styles' analysis of plebeian clothing and de Vries' notion of industrious revolution. From the work of Walsh and others, we also have an increasingly good idea of some of the practices and priorities deployed by wealthier consumers when shopping for durable and semi-durable goods such as textiles.⁷ Yet we know remarkably little about the retailing of textiles through the ordinary shops of provincial England. Once thought of as drab and unappealing spaces, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century shops are now widely recognised as the centrepiece of what were often quite sophisticated modes of selling.⁸ Shopkeepers promoted their business by displaying wares in the window and on specialist fitments within the shop; they also advertised through a range of printed media, including newspapers, trade cards and bill heads.⁹

My concern here is with the ways in which Indian textiles fitted into this broader set of retail changes: were they as transformatory here as they were in the tastes and material culture of English consumers? The chapter begins by exploring the range of textiles stocked by provincial shopkeepers in late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century England, focusing in particular on the mix of stock and the degree of specialisation amongst retailers. Here I draw on detailed analysis of the probate inventories of thirty-five shopkeepers dying between 1661 and 1752 to assess how the availability of different textiles varied over time, not least in response to government attempts to limit the sale and use of printed calicoes. Although relatively modest in size, this sample covers a range of different settlements, from villages to large towns, and a variety of occupational specialisms. It thus provides a good picture of broader retail processes. Building on this, the chapter considers the ways in which a small, but growing number of shopkeepers sought to market their wares through the printed media. Here I want to assess the role of certain types of fabrics in the promotional strategies of retailers: were imported textiles, most notably Indian calicoes, preferentially named in advertisements and was provenance used as a particular selling point? Further, I seek to analyse the nature of

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these advertisements as instruments of marketing: to what extent did they promote certain cultural values, such as politeness, or social-commercial imperatives, most especially fashion? More importantly, can we see the retailing of (new) textiles as driving or responding to shifts in taste and fashion? In addressing these questions, the chapter both demonstrates the adaptability of retail systems and challenges the transformative power of imported textiles.

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[B] Changes in stock

Even a cursory examination of the probate inventories of shopkeepers reveals that a large range of fabrics was available to provincial consumers. Those analysed here stocked an average of fourteen different types of cloth, defined in terms of the names given by the appraisers, but around one-quarter had over twenty types and were clearly able to accommodate a wide variety of customers and needs. In most instances, choice was extended considerably through the provision of a wide range of colours and patterns. The Ormskirk draper, Henry Helsby (d.1727), for example, had exactly fourteen types of cloth, but this included, amongst many others, tammies that were red, blue, black, striped, mixed, blue and red striped, black and white striped, green, green and red striped, orange, red and white striped, grey, yellow, pale snuff, blue and white striped, gold and scarlet.¹⁰ This breadth was unusual, but the provision of variety within cloth types was repeated in practically every shop stocking textiles. Importantly, a wide range of stock was not restricted to retailers in larger centres. Indeed, those offering the widest choice were found in relatively small towns (including Eccleshall, Northwich and Warwick), and even rural shops could contain a surprising variety of fabric types. In the Cheshire village of Bunbury, with an early-eighteenth century population of perhaps 300, Richard Smith (d.1716) stocked twenty different types of fabric, including eleven types of woollens, four of linens and a variety of mixed fabrics.¹¹ What made Smith unusual was not the variety of stock on his shelves, but the fact that he sold

few other goods apart from textiles. Most of the shopkeepers analysed here showed a distinct lack of specialisation, even when their occupational title suggested otherwise. Thus, John Atkins, a mercer in Kenilworth, Warwickshire (d.1730), had sugar, dried fruit, spices, corks, gunpowder, dyes, brooms, candles and pipes as well as a stock of thirteen different types of fabrics from shagg and calamanco, through fustian, to cotton checks and dimities.¹² Conversely, we see men like Ralph Edge, an ironmonger in the Cheshire village of Tarporley (d.1683), stocking a wide range of fabrics – including printed paragons, coloured fustians, even calicos – alongside his mainstay of hardware goods.¹³

Overall, then, these inventories show that consumers could buy a wide range of fabrics from local shops. They confirm the supply side of de Vries' argument for a structural shift away from home production and onto market provision. Whilst Styles cautions against assuming that any changeover was rapid or systematic, it is clear that fabrics for a variety of domestic uses and at a range of prices were locally available.¹⁴ More importantly for the present argument, the inventories also indicate a shift in the type of cloths available as we move into the second quarter of the eighteenth century.

As is clear from Table 8.1, woollens formed the bedrock of provision for all these retailers. The range of woollens was considerably greater than that for any other cloth type, generally comprising between one-half and two-thirds of the fabrics being offered for sale. In addition to the ubiquitous broad or plain cloth, the most common types were serges, shalloons and flannels – all fairly traditional fabrics used for outer clothing. The other mainstay was linens, with buckrams and canvas being the most common. The dominance of these two groups was maintained throughout the period, but there was a gradual transition in the varieties of cloth: callamancos, harrateens, kidderminsters and damasks becoming more widely available, whilst paragons, plushes and Scotch cloths seemingly disappeared.¹⁵ This suggests that retailers were responding to and perhaps shaping changes in consumer

preferences, but this occurred firmly within a set of British and European textiles which were variations on established themes. Very different from this were Indian fabrics, already widely available in provincial shops in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. It is no surprise to see specialist mercers, such as Julius Billiers of Warwick (d.1676), holding large stocks of Bengals, calicos, dimities and muslins; but these exotic imports were also found in more modest village shops like that of Ralph Edge whose stock included 25 yards of white and 70 yards of coloured calicos.¹⁶ That these were the printed cloths so much in demand by consumers – the cottons described by Lemire as ‘fashion’s favourite’ – is clear from the detailed descriptions included in some of the inventories. Billiers’ stock included ‘printed calico’, as did that of James Rathbone of Macclesfield (d.1702) and Oliver Black of Liverpool (d.1709); Mary Higgins of Chesterfield (d.1701) sold ‘strip’t Bengals’ and John Pactor of Newcastle-under-Lyme (d.1701) had ‘flowered calicos’, whilst Henry Bolt of Bromsgrove (d.1702) stocked calicos that were white, blue, coloured and stamp’t’.¹⁷

The availability of such fabrics reflects the late seventeenth-century blossoming in demand noted by Defoe, but many shops continued to stock (and presumably sell) them well after the ban on imports in 1700. Some of this continuity of supply can probably be explained by the fact that many of the calicos and muslins that appear in inventories from the 1700s and 1710s were white and therefore quite legal. However, some retailers continued to offer patterned calicos, Oliver Black (d.1709) having five pieces of printed calico, each 18 yards in length. Perhaps such retailers argued that they were clearing stock acquired before the import ban came into force or that these cloths were produced by British printers.¹⁸ Whatever the case, the period after 1715 saw a marked change in the proportion of shops selling cottons and the range of such fabrics held. After this date, there is only one shopkeeper’s inventory that includes calico and one other that mentions Bengal; muslin disappears altogether. These India imports were replaced in the inventories by dimities (which make their first appearance in the

shops sampled here in 1716) and more especially by a range of mixed fabrics, including checks and poplins. The former were generally a mix of cotton and linen, manufactured in Lancashire and, as the name suggests, patterned; the latter appears to have increasingly referred to cotton mixes. These might be seen as examples of Smith's 'substitute status commodities', consumed in the apparent absence of (more desirable) Indian imports. 'Printed linens', which appear with growing frequency after 1715, might be viewed in a similar manner, but it is possible that some of these fabrics were, in reality, printed cottons. Styles has argued that those prosecuting the theft of fashionable fabrics referred to them as cottons regardless of the actual composition of the cloth.¹⁹ Perhaps the men who drew shopkeepers' inventories were masking illegal stock with such labels.

Whatever the exact make-up of these cloths, the change in stock held by provincial textile retailers was striking; it matches the changing legal status of Indian cottons. Whilst inventory evidence deteriorates after the 1730s, newspaper advertisements provide some idea of the stock held by shopkeepers in the succeeding decades, although they rarely include exhaustive listings of stock. Where they do, it is often because the nature of the retailing is peculiar, for example a visiting dealer setting up a 'warehouse' for the season, looking to clear a large stock relatively quickly and therefore keen to publicise their range of stock.²⁰ Through the middle decades of the eighteenth century, these advertisements suggest a continuation of the trends apparent from the probate inventories. The sample is too small to allow meaningful quantitative analysis, but the 1775 advertisement placed by Plowden Jennett in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* is fairly typical. He listed a total of sixteen different types of fabric as being available in his Wolverhampton shop, including seven kinds of woollens, four kinds of silks, and three of linens. There is no sign of Indian fabrics, beyond plain muslins; but there were printed linens and cottons (presumably from Lancashire).²¹ This pattern is reflected in the goods reported as stolen from the shop of the Mary Drake in the small town of Olney in

Buckinghamshire. These included silk handkerchiefs, ribbons, lawns and cambricks, and also 'several Pieces of Printed Linen and Cottons'.²²

After the prohibitions on calicos were lifted in 1774 there was another marked shift in the stock held and advertised by provincial shopkeepers. By this time, there was an increasing tendency to specialisation and a commensurate distinction emerging between the stock of woollen and linen drapers. It was the latter who tended to stock cottons and they enthusiastically listed a range of apparently imported fabrics. There were chintzes, calicos and muslins; but also cherryderries and gingham. It is difficult to be certain whether these were products of Indian or English manufacturers, but some advertisements hint at a distinction between the two. In 1778 the Chester draper Anthony Mackie, listed 'printed muslins, calicos, cottons and linens'; four years later in Wolverhampton the mercer, S. Addey, advertised 'printed linens, calicoes and cottons'.²³ Similarly, the trade card of Thomas Lomas from Leicester highlights the 'greatest variety of printed linens, cottons, calicos and chints [sic]' as well as plain, flowered and striped muslins.²⁴ Elsewhere, the link to India was made explicit, with notices placed in the Birmingham press for 'The East India Warehouse' and 'The East India Repository'. These shops offered such delights as 'muslins sprigged, striped and plain' and the 'Best Chintz Patterns for Ladies Gowns'; but the image of exotic imports was spoiled somewhat in the latter by the listing of Hollands and Irish linen alongside chintzes, muslins and gingham.²⁵

Taken together, then, the inventories and advertisements present a picture of the widespread, but changing availability of a wide variety of fabrics in seventeenth and eighteenth century provincial England. Consumers across the country had ready access to English, European and Indian fabrics, although the provision of the last of these was heavily influenced by the imposition and subsequent lifting of embargoes on the importation and wearing of printed calicos, and the related growth of a domestic cotton industry. Given the

sustained popularity of such textiles throughout the eighteenth century and their importance in shaping the nature and appearance of clothing and domestic fabrics, it might be expected that they would feature prominently in the printed advertisements produced by shopkeepers to promote themselves and their businesses.

[B] **Marketing textiles**

As is already apparent, many advertisements for textiles took the form of lists of goods, a format which was prevalent amongst some of the earliest newspaper advertisements in the provincial press. During 1711, for example, three drapers placed notices in the *Norwich Gazette*; after giving the address of the shop, all went on to list the kind of goods available therein.²⁶ By the middle of the eighteenth century, around one-third of advertisements took this form; a proportion which rose through the succeeding decades, in line with more general trends in retailers' advertisements (Table 8.2).²⁷ Moreover, this format was repeated in a number of trade cards issued in the second half of the century, including that of Thomas Lomas.²⁸ At first glance, such advertisements can appear to be rather pedestrian and prosaic. Yet, at a time when the availability of new stock was uncertain, and with the pressure to keep up with other businesses, it was vital that the potential customers knew what stock shopkeepers carried. By detailing the goods in the shop, such advertisements contributed to growing consumer knowledge and presented an image of plenty and choice. The shopkeeper is thus shown as providing for the consumer's every need – something that was particularly important for those setting up shop for a limited period, for example during a fair.

This impression of variety and choice is brought out in other newspaper advertisements through assertions that the retailer offered a large or complete assortment of fabrics (Table 8.2).²⁹ It is reinforced elsewhere by the inclusion of prices alongside the list of goods, which itself had two key effects. First, it heightened the notion of choice. Thomas

Bromilow, for example, could offer 'sprig'd and flower'd all over jaconet muslin' costing between 7s and 21s per yard (Figure 8.1), whilst the 'Silk and Haberdashery Warahouse' [sic] in Liverpool advertised plain and flowered satin from 18s to £2 10s per yard.³⁰ Such distinctions in price allowed shopkeepers to cater for a range of customers who were differentiated by their spending power and the quality of the cloth they bought and wore. Second, publishing prices also gave advertisements a competitive dimension, generally being included when the shopkeeper saw them as being particularly keen. Many advertisers stressed that they offered good value (Table 8.2), but some were far more specific. The owners of the East India Warehouse in Birmingham claimed that they were selling 'cheaper by 20 per cent than ever before sold in this town, and a great many articles 50 per cent'.³¹ There are echoes here of the rhetoric deployed by a new breed of tea dealers that emerged in the years following the sharp reduction in duties facilitated by the Commutation Act of 1782.³² Such advertising works on the consumer being motivated by choice and price, rather than by less tangible concerns such as the service offered by the retailer. It is also suggestive of an increasingly competitive market, with prices being advertised as a means of gaining commercial advantage over rival dealers. The impression of a shift to more aggressive forms of marketing noted by Mui and Mui is reinforced by occasional advertisements which aimed invective directly at competitors. This was a key feature of a newly open market for tea dealing and is also apparent in the textiles trade. For example, in 1756, Plowden Jennett placed a long and rambling notice in the Birmingham press, justifying his decision to retain his shop in Wolverhampton longer than he had planned because of the negative publicity coming from a rival in the town. Similarly, George Griffith attempted to undermine the claims of rival mercers in Chester that their goods were the stock of a Spitalfields weaver (Figure 8.2).³³

It is easy to over-interpret these notices, not least because this polemic style characterised only a small minority of advertisements. Indeed, the most striking feature of cloth sellers' advertisements through this period was the enduring importance of established styles and linguistic forms. Over half took the form of notices advising the public of a new business being established; a change of address, or new stock being acquired. This need to legitimise newspaper advertising was stronger in drapers and mercers than amongst shopkeepers in general, suggesting the enduring importance of established trading practices and a greater concern for respectability and reputation – essential to credit-worthiness and thus to business success.³⁴ Linked to this were attempts to associate the retailer with social elites by addressing their advertisements to the gentry and nobility, and more particularly the ladies (Figure 8.3).³⁵ Whilst some advertisers undoubtedly had ambitions to supply such prime consumers, for most it is doubtful whether the gentry formed a large section of their clientele or the intended target of these advertisements. As with the 'useful manuals' studied by Klein, it is more likely that the real audience were those amongst the middling sorts with the opportunity for, or pretensions to, upward social mobility.³⁶ Addressing notices to the gentry associated both the shopkeeper and their customers with the local elite. Reading these advertisements, the middling sorts might imagine themselves to be part of a wider grouping comprising the nobility, gentry, merchants and 'others'. In short, they could position themselves within polite society. Given the increasing fluidity of status titles through the eighteenth century, they might even see themselves to be part of the gentry.³⁷

In this light, we can best see such salutations as part of the careful wording of advertisements which were, as Barker observes, 'almost always couched in a particular form of polite, deferential language' (Table 8.2).³⁸ A growing number of advertisements expressed thanks for past 'favours' and the hope of further patronage which would be warranted by their

assiduous attention to the needs of the customer. For example, a Norwich linen-draper returned his:

... most grateful thanks to those ladies, Gentlemen and others for those distinguishing Favours he has already experienced and hopes, by an unremitting Attention to the Quality of his Goods, to merit the Continuance of them, which will be gratefully acknowledged by their most obedient servant.

JOSHUA SMITH³⁹

This kind of formalised and polite language, together with the flattery being extended towards the reader, took place firmly within a broader marrying up of polite and commercial worlds.⁴⁰ As Defoe noted, the shopkeeper was ‘the most obliging, most gentleman-like, of a tradesman’.⁴¹ Some adopted the language and patrician manners of the elites, but this was balanced by a concern with the commodities and concerns of the retail business. Whilst Joshua Smith was keen to address his thanks to genteel customers (either real or imagined), he also emphasised the quality of his merchandise as a key selling point. The intersection of politeness and commerce can be seen in the practice of addressing advertisements to ‘friends’ and ‘the public’: differentiating a set of privileged (and self-identifying) customers from the general reader. Friends were valued customers with whom personal bonds were strong: the sort of person who might receive an ornate trade card or be invited into a back room, behind the shop.⁴² In focusing on these people, shopkeepers looked to cultivate their key customers, but also to create an atmosphere of sociability – a key aspect of polite society.⁴³ They combined commercial and polite ambitions. Given this, it is significant that advertisements addressed to friends and/or the public seem became increasingly common as the eighteenth century progressed (Table 8.2). Notices, such as that placed by P. Prichard (Figure 8.4), thus aimed to drum up new business as well as cement established relationships.⁴⁴ The public was linked to as well as differentiated from friends: they were given the implicit invitation to

(re)define their relationship with the shopkeeper or service-provider, establishing, through their regular custom, their status as ‘friends’ and their part in a circle of quasi-polite sociability.

This mode of advertising helped to place mercers and drapers within the bounds of polite society. It sold the shopkeeper as a reputable and respectable member of urban society as well as a useful link to the commercial world of goods. Yet newspaper advertisements in particular increasingly aimed to sell the fabrics which comprised their stock. Mui and Mui argue that price was critical here, but what comes through the advertisement sampled here are notions of taste and fashion.⁴⁵ Taste was communicated in various ways, most obviously through descriptions of the goods as ‘elegant’ or ‘genteel’ (Table 8.2). These are slippery concepts, with nuanced meanings.⁴⁶ Yet both communicated key messages about both the quality and qualities of the goods being described, and the kind of consumer to whom they would appeal. ‘Genteel’ suggested goods suitable for the higher social orders: refined, correct and respectable. ‘Elegance’ implied something that was tasteful, neat and simple; yet also stylish and even fashionable. A feeling for this can be got from the notice placed by the Liverpool silk mercers, Prichard & Co., who described their newly acquired stock as ‘elegantly fancy’d, and of the best quality’.⁴⁷ Both descriptors were sometimes applied generally to the shopkeeper’s stock-in-trade. Where they were tied to particular kinds of cloth, it was generally the more ornate fabrics, including printed cottons and chintzes, but also silks and lawns. Woollens were seldom described in this way. Given this, it is striking that these words and phrases were absent from advertisements appearing in the 1740s and 1750s, yet quite common by the 1770s and 1780s. As we have seen, there was a wide range of patterned and printed fabrics available in provincial shops during the middle decades of the eighteenth century, so it appears that such terms, whilst by no means new in themselves, were only

becoming important in the lexicography of advertising and perhaps of shopkeepers in the second half of the century.

Much the same was true of fashion and the notion of goods being fashionable. Whilst this linked closely to ideas of elegance (the two terms often appearing in conjunction with one another in advertisements) fashion was a rather broader idea with several overlapping aspects and meanings. Berg argues that it involved ideas of novelty and newness, notions of taste and sensuality, and the ability to be assimilated into established genres.⁴⁸ All of these can be seen in shopkeepers' advertisements, but the term was usually used to connote goods that were new, novel or modish.⁴⁹ This itself comprised a number of elements.

First is the idea of newness, seen in many newspaper advertisements in the form of newly acquired stock. Thus, Anthony Mackie of Chester announced in 1778 that he had just 'laid in a new and compleat Assortment of the most fashionable goods', whilst in Birmingham Goolden & Co. advertised in 1782 that their silks were 'of the newest Fashion and best Fabric'.⁵⁰ The idea of stock being 'fresh' was important; even when selling off the old stock of a deceased or bankrupt tradesman, efforts were made to emphasise the relative newness of the goods. For example, the stock of the late Sarah Challoner was described in 1780 as having 'been laid in within these two years'.⁵¹ One reason for this concern was the accelerating pace at which fashions changed or at least were seen to change. Some shopkeepers were keen to emphasise that they were able to offer fabrics appropriate to the fashion for that season. This generally meant spring or summer, an emphasis which was reflected in the monthly distribution of advertisements mentioning fashion as a selling point (Table 8.3). We see, for example, Orton & Co. of Liverpool announcing in February 1770 that they had stock 'laid in for the spring', whilst in Worcester, Bayliss, Goolden & Co. advertised in May 1772 that they had a 'genteel assortment of new silks for the spring and summer season'.⁵² This pattern was reinforced by the practice, noted earlier, of opening of warehouses for the spring or summer

seasons. That said, there was also a significant winter peak in selling through fashion, perhaps coinciding with the winter season enjoyed by many provincial towns, especially county towns. It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that such announcements were particularly common in the Chester press: George Griffith advertising that he had fabrics ‘suitable to the present and Winter Season’ and George Lowe that he had ‘WINTER SILKS, suitable for the present season’.⁵³

It is not easy to know how closely these fabrics conformed to the norms established in metropolitan magazines, but the wide availability of such literature from the 1750s onwards suggests that they could not have strayed too far from known standards.⁵⁴ Claims for fashion, like those for elegance, were most commonly made for cotton, silk and occasionally linen-based cloths, especially those that were coloured or patterned. Orton and Co., for example, announced that their new spring stock comprised a ‘great variety of the new colours’. Similarly, Prichard, on an advertisement placed directly above that of Orton and Co., trumpeted his ‘great variety of the different new patterns, calculated for the spring’ (Figure 8.4).⁵⁵ This emphasis on colour and pattern links to Berg’s suggestion of a sensual aspect to fashion, but also forms the most obvious way for fashions to change whilst the fabric and its intrinsic qualities, desirability and utility remained essentially the same. What this pair of advertisements also illustrates is the importance attached to the newness and urgency of fashion. Both emphasise that they are bringing in their new stock as early as they can, and Prichard impresses upon the reader that he will ‘make a point of furnishing himself ... with such others, and those of the most elegant fancy, that are now making for the approaching months’. True to his word, and by then trading as Prichard and Co., he advertised later in the same year that he had ‘A Very large assortment of the various new Patterns made for the Spring and Summer Seasons’.⁵⁶ Moreover, his advertisements stressed the importance of regular attendance at his shop in order to keep up with the latest developments in taste and

fashion. The shopkeeper cast himself as a tastemaker, whilst reading advertisements and visiting the shop allowed consumers to produce and reproduce themselves as polite – adding their own interpretation onto the meaning of the construct.

Fashion was, of course, linked to space as well as time. As Cox and Dannehl argue, references to London heightened the desirability of goods and the perceived quality and fashionability of workmanship.⁵⁷ Supplies from the capital were particularly important to mercers, drapers and milliners, and a growing proportion made mention of the capital in their advertisements – a connection which was drawn by tradesmen in all the towns sampled. Some stressed London as the source of their goods, as with the sale of ‘the entire stock of a Weaver, in Spitalfields, London’ (Figure 8.5) – although, as we have already seen, the provenance of these goods did not go unchallenged.⁵⁸ Others marked their own credentials as tradesmen from London, a selling point used by Prichard, for instance. But London was not the only point of reference. At one level, there was awareness of the national specificity of fashion, even amongst goods which may well have been sourced from overseas. Indian manufacturers had long been producing cloth specifically for the European market, but there were fears amongst some consumers that fabrics being sold cheaply were undesirable goods being off-loaded by unscrupulous dealers. E. Bushell at once played on and assuaged these fears. Whilst he was offering his goods at or below cost, he argued that they were ‘entirely adapted to the Fashion of this Country, and very Superior in Quality as well as Pattern, to those design’d for a Foreign Market’.⁵⁹ A more specific point of reference was the manufacturer of the cloth and the idea that goods had come direct from the maker to the shop. The advertisement for the sale of silks in Chester emphasised that the goods were from a weaver, and Anthony Mackie claimed that, as he had been ‘particularly careful in purchasing from the best manufactories, flatters himself he shall be able to accommodate those who please to honour him with their favours’.⁶⁰ Whilst there is some suggestion that this would ease the speed of supply and

reduce the cost of goods, the real issue here appears to be assuring the customer of the quality of the wares and their aptness for the provincial consumer.

What is largely missing from these advertisements, and also from the trade cards issued by drapers and mercers, is any attempt to play on the exotic nature of these goods, perhaps because they had long since been 'naturalised' by manufacturers who claimed them as British. Thomas Lomas identified a large number of fabrics by their place of origin on his trade card, although in some cases the reference was to a style or quality of product rather than the actual location of manufacture. The link is drawn more directly in the 1769 card of Tatlow and Johnson of Derby which includes images of spinning and weaving within a fashionable rococo frame.⁶¹ This theme became a leitmotif of later trade cards. By the early nineteenth century, they regularly depicted sheep being shorn and fabrics being worked into clothing manufactured, often by hand (Figure 8.6).⁶² Yet all these emphasise traditional European and British products, playing on the link to local and known provenance. Nowhere is the link to India made explicit; nor is Indian imagery used to suggest exoticism in the way that grocers in the early nineteenth century almost invariably deployed images of China and Chinese figures on their trade cards.⁶³ The reasons for this are complex. Grocers were keen to establish the authenticity and genuine nature of their tea because of scares over the adulteration of stock. Cloth dealers had no such problems and therefore no imperative to emphasise the genuine exoticism of their wares. Moreover, by this date, associations with India had been weakened by the growing supply of British printed cottons so that, unlike tea, they were no longer exotic imported goods. Advertising thus linked shifting geographies of production with mental constructs of cottons as British goods to play down exotic origins and influences.

[B] Conclusions

In this paper, I have sought to offer a more detailed understanding of the distribution of fabrics through the ordinary shops of provincial England. I have argued that consumers were able to buy a wide range of fabrics from specialist and non-specialist retailers located in many villages as well as towns. The stock held by these provincial shopkeepers tells a story of changing demand and supply, not least as taste responded to prohibitions on the sale and use of Indian fabrics, in part by switching to British-made textiles. Widely available in even modest village shops in the late seventeenth century, printed calicos were replaced by patterned linens and cottons, most probably of domestic manufacture. Yet shop inventories also demonstrate considerable continuity in stock. Woollens remained the most widely available textiles throughout the period. In addition to variety in terms of thickness, finish and durability, they were sold in a sometimes bewildering range of colours and patterns. What they did not readily offer – at least not at prices affordable by anyone outside the wealthy elite – was the intricacy of design made available through printed cottons. Given the prominence afforded to such fabrics in the literature on clothing and the textiles industry, the fact that shopkeepers made relatively little attempt to highlight the exotic associations of their chintzes, calicos and muslins, even when prohibitions were lifted in 1774, is a tribute to the extent to which cotton had been domesticated as British by the mid eighteenth century. What is most striking about the newspaper advertisements is the way in which they mirrored more general trends in advertising during this period. They listed goods available, emphasised politeness through their structure and language, and promoted goods as fashionable. Moreover, by the 1770s it was not the fabric itself that signified fashionability, but the particular colour or pattern which it carried. Cotton may have been ‘fashion’s favourite’, but it was fashion rather than cotton that was being marketed.

¹ Useful entries into this extensive literature can be made through: A. Buck (1979), *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Batsford); B. Lemire (1991), *Fashion’s Favourite: The*

Cotton Trade and the Consumer in Britain, 1660-1800 (Oxford: Oxford University Press); B. Lemire (2003), 'Fashioning Cottons: Asian Trade, Domestic Industry and Consumer Demand, 1660-1780', in D. Jenkins (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles*, vol.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 493-512; G. Riello and P. Parthasarathi (eds) (2009), *The Spinning World. A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

² N. Steensgard (1990), 'The Growth and Composition of the Long-Distance Trade of England and the Dutch Republic before 1750', in J.D. Tracy (ed.) *The Rise of Merchant Empires. Long-Distance Trade in the Early-Modern World, 1350-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 126.

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⁴ D. Defoe (1708) *A Review of the State of the British Nation* (London).

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⁷ B. Lemire (1991) 'Peddling Fashion: Salesmen, Pawnbrokers, Tailors, Thieves and the Second-Hand Clothes Trade in England, c.1700-1800', *Textile History*, 22, pp. 67-82; Styles, *Dress of the People*, pp. 135-78; J. de Vries (2008) *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer*

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⁸ See C. Walsh (1995) 'Shop design and the display of goods in eighteenth-century London', *Journal of Design History*, 8, pp. 157-76; N. Cox (2000) *The Complete Tradesman: A Study of Retailing, 1550-1820* (Aldershot: Ashgate), pp. 76-115; J. Stobart, A. Hann and V. Morgan (2007) *Spaces of Consumption. Leisure and Shopping in the English Town, c.1680-1830* (London: Routledge), pp. 123-132.

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¹¹ Cheshire and Chester Archives (CCA), WS 1716 Richard Smith of Bunbury.

¹² Lichfield Joint Record Office (LJRO), B/C/11 1730 John Atkins of Kenilworth.

¹³ CCA, WS 1683 Ralph Edge of Tarporley.

¹⁴ De Vries, *Industrious Revolution*, pp. 133-44; Styles, *Dress of the People*, pp. 135-51.

¹⁵ A transition which parallels that taking place in North America; see R. duPlessis (2009) 'Cottons consumption in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century North Atlantic' in P. Parthasarathi and G. Riello (eds) *The Spinning World. A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 240-42.

¹⁶ Worcester Record Office (WRO), 1676 Julius Billiers of Warwick.

¹⁷ CCA, WS 1702, James Rathbone of Macclesfield; LRO, WCW 1709 Oliver Black of Liverpool; LJRO, B/C/11 1701 Mary Higgins of Chesterfield; LJRO, B/C/11 1701 John Proctor of Newcastle; WRO, 1702 Henry Bolt of Bromsgrove. No inventory included fabrics described as chintz, but these flowered and printed calicos appear to be chintzes in all but name.

¹⁸ See S. D. Chapman and S. Chassagne (1981) *European Textile Printers in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Heinemann); Lemire's contribution to this volume.

¹⁹ Styles, *Dress of the People*, p. 113.

²⁰ See, for example, *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 9 July 1772.

²¹ *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 18 August 1755.

²² *Northampton Mercury*, 18 February 1754.

²³ *Adams Weekly Courant*, 17 March 1778; *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 6 January 1782.

²⁴ Bodleian Library, John Johnson Collection (BL, JJC), Trade Cards 12 (129).

²⁵ *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 7 October 1782.

²⁶ *Norwich Gazette*: 21-28 April 1711, 19-26 May 1711, 30 June – 7 July 1711.

²⁷ Stobart, 'Selling (through) politeness'; C. Ferdinand (1993) 'Selling it to the provinces: news and commerce round eighteenth-century Salisbury', in J. Brewer and R. Porter (eds) *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge), pp. 393-411.

²⁸ BL, JJC, Trade Cards 22 (17).

²⁹ *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 17 June 1782, *Adams Weekly Courant*, 11 October 1774, 17 March 1778.

³⁰ *Gore's Liverpool Advertiser*, 6 April 1770, 23 November 1770.

³¹ *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 25 November 1782. See also H.-C. Mui and L. Mui (1989) *Shops and Shopkeeping in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge), pp. 234-7.

³² Mui and Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping*, 249-87; J. Stobart (2013) *Sugar and Spice: Grocers and Groceries in Provincial England, 1650-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 176-81.

³³ Mui and Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping*, p. 234; *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 19 January 1756; *Adams Weekly Courant*, 11 October 1774.

³⁴ Compare Table 8.2 with the figures in Stobart, 'Selling (through) politeness'. On the importance of reputation, see C. Muldrew (1998) *The Economy of Obligation. The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early-Modern England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan), pp. 148-72.

³⁵ *Northampton Mercury*, 1 May 1780; *Adams Weekly Courant*, 11 October 1774; *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 3 June 1782.

³⁶ L. Klein (1995) 'Politeness for Plebes: consumption and social identity in early eighteenth-century England', in J. Brewer and A. Bermingham (eds), *The Culture of Consumption: Image, Object, Text* (London: Routledge), pp. 371-2; Stobart, 'Selling (through) politeness'.

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³⁸ H. Barker (2006) *The Business of Women. Female Enterprise and urban Development in Northern England, 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 81.

³⁹ *Norwich Gazette*, 1783.

⁴⁰ M. Berg (2005) *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 233; Klein, 'Politeness for Plebes'; Mui and Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping*, p. 237.

⁴¹ Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, quoted in Klein, 'Politeness for Plebes', p. 372.

⁴² Berg and Clifford, 'Selling Consumption', pp. 149-51; Cox, *Complete Tradesman*, pp. 127-39.

⁴³ See P. Borsay (1989) *The English Urban Renaissance. Culture and Society in the English Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 267-82.

⁴⁴ *Gore's Liverpool Advertiser*, 9 February 1770.

⁴⁵ Mui and Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping*, p. 234-8

⁴⁶ See A. Vickery (1998) *The Gentleman's Daughter. Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press), especially pp 13, 161-2; Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability*, pp. 25-7.

⁴⁷ *Gore's Liverpool Advertiser*, 13 April 1770.

⁴⁸ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, pp. 249-57.

⁴⁹ J. Stobart, 'In and out of fashion? Advertising novel and second-hand goods in Georgian England', in B. Blonde et al (eds), *Fashioning Old and New. Changing Consumer Patterns in Western Europe (1650-1900)* (Turnhout: Brepols), pp. 135-7.

⁵⁰ *Adams Weekly Courant*, 17 March 1778; *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 8 April 1782.

⁵¹ *Northampton Mercury*, 3 January 1780.

⁵² *Gore's Liverpool Advertiser*, 9 February 1770; *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 21 May 1772.

⁵³ *Adams Weekly Courant*, 11 October 1774, 11 November 1777. The seasonality of advertising and retailing in general is an area that needs much more detailed research.

⁵⁴ Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite*, pp. 168-76.

⁵⁵ *Gore's Liverpool Advertiser*, 9 February 1770.

⁵⁶ *Gore's Liverpool Advertiser*, 13 April 1770.

⁵⁷ N. Cox and K. Dannehl (2007) *Perceptions of Retailing in Early-Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate), pp. 109-11.

⁵⁸ *Adams Weekly Courant*, 11 October 1774.

⁵⁹ *Adams Weekly Courant*, 1 September 1778.

⁶⁰ *Adams Weekly Courant*, 17 March 1778.

⁶¹ BL, JJC, Trade Cards 12 (118).

⁶² Northamptonshire Central Library, uncatalogued trade ephemera: bill heads for Samuel Harris, 1823; J.P. Kilpin, 1839.

⁶³ Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, pp. 171-5.